

APPENDIX F

Talking Book Library

Staff Focus Groups and Interviews Summary

Five staff members and volunteers took part in a focus group; interviews were conducted with three additional staff members.

Executive Summary:

The people who worked in TBL think the service is important and that the users receive good service. There was agreement, however, that the service lacks sufficient outreach and promotion. "People don't know about the service, nor that it's free to eligible users." Staff suggested that most of the complaints that they receive are about things that are outside their control: the content of the recorded materials--too much or too little sex or too much violence and murder; or problems in mail delivery.

Some felt that the Web OPAC (online catalog) is likely to have an impact, probably increasing the number of users of the service, particularly younger, computer literate people. It was suggested that this also might be a way for public library staffs to be more involved in providing service to potential TBL users. However, only one percent of the users responding to a recent TBL survey have a computer they could use it to access the TBL collections to select titles. Computers are also having an impact within the TBL in that much of the work of the agency is done by volunteers and these are often older people who have not used computers extensively and would not choose to volunteer for tasks requiring computer use.

The lack of space is a problem for TBL staff and volunteers; being crowded means the collections have to be weeded often and staff who use telephones (the reader's advisors) have difficulty in making themselves understood over the noise. An improved telephone system, one with voice mail, was suggested as a way of helping staff overcome this problem.

Overall the TBL suffers from lack of financial resources. The high number of volunteers working in the TBL is both a blessing and a problem. The agency could not perform the amount of work it does without the volunteers, but the high number of volunteers is also perceived by the legislature as an efficient way to save money.

Future directions include digitization and, perhaps, expanding into descriptive videos. TBL is waiting for the National Library Service (NLS) to determine its future directions before TBL moves toward other formats. Regardless of the next formats, any planning process undertaken by TBL will need to be inclusive.

Staff Focus Group

How do people find out about TBL?

MT Association for the Blind; social workers who help sign people up, a couple of hospitals, School for the Blind in Great Falls. Christie speaks to groups. People in the community using the service tell others. Word of mouth. We try to work with schools; reading disability students.

We lack outreach; PR. People don't know about the service. Two in this group learned about it from volunteers—people they knew who happened to be volunteers here. There was an announcement on PBS program for senior citizens. Fact that it's free is unknown to most.

Computer system has recently been refined, so we could handle a lot more patrons. Just went online with Web OPAC—people can order books on line. That should appeal to a whole new population base, those who have computers.

What will we hear from users that they dislike about service?

Most complaints come about too much or too little sex or murder (like westerns, but no violence; like romances, but no sex). We're getting better at adjusting people's profiles to send them just what they want.

Maybe you'll hear about glitches in the system—woman who got 20 books at once, for example.

We have mail issues too—stuff comes back the next day after we've mailed it. The main complaint is not enough books or that they come too late—they're problems in mail delivery. Sometimes people get things a week or two later. There are problems with mail delivery in Helena, Butte, and Missoula. Delivery is good in Great Falls. We've had DVDs stolen—three through Butte. In one other instance a case came back empty, but we were able to trace it to a new postal carrier. It came back a month later. So—we changed the labeling on the boxes so it doesn't say video any more. Outside labeling is in braille! Some people like to use these videos with narration because they can "watch" a movie with their families.

What other library services do they use?

Most don't realize they can ILL large print from other libraries. Some have used public library audio books (We know because they're returned to us.) The public library could become a great resource if we could train staff there. They could get to the website OPAC and look for/order things for TBL users (and others). You do have to have a patron ID to borrow from it.

TBL has 50,000 titles of unabridged books, usually 4 or 5 copies of each, and about 600 Montana books.

We tried deposit collections in public libraries years ago, but lost lots of books and machines, especially machines, so we stopped doing it.

Do you make selections for people or is the selection mostly automatic?

It varies... patron records are coded:

TA = computer selects based on general areas-romances, etc.

TL = they tell you specifically which books or authors they want.

We try to put most patrons on TA at first because some older patrons have trouble getting everything set up. We start them with three books. Then you do a follow up after a month or two to check on them. Some patrons have health issues—they forget that they've called already today. In-state users can use an 800 #; snowbirds (AZ, TX) would like an out-of-state 800#. We continue to send things to snowbirds while they're gone. Transferring to another state is pretty easy, but if they're coming back we don't transfer them.

We have 2,600-3,000 users; maybe one percent of them have a computer.

Twenty-two have signed up to use the Web OPAC; seven have actually used it to order books. Another eight email their book orders to us.

We think use of the web OPAC will pick up more in the fall after school starts.

We anticipate that this type of use will grow over time.

What progress has been made in reaching the TBL goals?

There are lots of financial problems at the moment. We can still provide things, but it takes longer. Goal 3 (*There will be sufficient funding and staff to offer the best possible patron service.*) should be first priority. We have hang-ups with the duplicator and can't buy new tapes (so that hinders service).

Space is a big problem. Lack of space makes us crowded and noisy; it's hard to talk on the phones.

We could get a better phone system with volume control, voice mail. Have only one voice mail—it's on the 800 line. It would be helpful if we each had voice mail. Patrons like to speak to their own reader's advisor.

We need another staff person to answer phones. Right now there's a Green Thumb person doing it for 20 hrs/week. Having that person here is great, because you can get so much more done (without the telephone interruptions).

I think we need another reader's advisor.

Volunteer said: "Reader's advisors talk wonderfully; they so patient with people."

Staff person: "volunteers do all the work."

The problem is that legislature looks at the number of volunteers and says "that's good; you're doing fine; you don't need anything more."

We have about seventy volunteers, which is about 6 FTEs, including the telephone pioneers.

Back to the three goals... are any inappropriate? How would you grade the progress that's been made in achieving these goals?

All are still good, appropriate.

Goal 1 *Staff, volunteers and patrons will work in a safe, comfortable, and efficient working environment.*

We are running out of space for the talking books... for a comfortable environment I'd give it an A for everything except efficient. We don't have a staff place to get away. It's just a little room and there is no place for the volunteers. Air quality is an F... the rest might be a B. I have allergies... had to be at home for a while when they were putting in the new carpeting. I'd give it a C

Goal 2 *Montana residents will receive the best possible service from the Talking Book Library.*

A

A+

A

A

Goal 3 *There will be sufficient funding and staff to offer the best possible patron service.*

KLAS (the computerized circulation and user tracking system) needs to be upgraded
Digitization is going to be very expensive...
Everything would be completely changed
We're waiting to find out what NLS is doing
Have to wait to print catalog
Have to wait months to have the duplicator fixed
Only two people can go to the Salt Lake Conference

F, F, F

TBL staff asked the consultants to share the feedback from the user sessions. "We'd like to know if they're satisfied."

Other Comments

The recording program focuses on Montana authors and issues; they record about fifty books each year from two recording studios: one here at TBL and another at the prison in Deer Lodge. There are twenty teams: a narrator, a monitor who runs the recording equipment, and a reviewer who listens to the product. They use NLS Standards as guidelines, but haven't gone through the official quality assurance program. The goal

this year is to get two books and one magazine on the official NLS list. Tasks for volunteers used to be very hands on, but tasks have evolved toward more clerical things. The easiest volunteer jobs to fill are the manual ones: rewinding tapes, pulling and re-shelving books. The hardest are any dealing with using the computer. The major pool of volunteers is senior citizens, many of whom haven't developed computer skills. The local RSVP has been sponsoring computer courses and that has helped a lot. Overall it averages 100-120 people per year who are volunteering at TBL, NRIS, and LLD. It's difficult to imagine how the talking books program could be done without volunteer assistance. There has been a major increase in users in last three years and the program will need another full time paid person soon.

On average 600 books a day are checked out; approximately the same number are checked in each day. Quite a few come back without a tape or needing repair. Maybe 20-25 a day need repair. Weeding the collection is the least satisfying part of circulation, but it has to be done because of the space limitations here. The complaints that we get are mostly related to users not getting the number of books they want, or not getting them as fast as they'd like. The post office here in Helena is a problem sometimes. Space is a problem here...maybe compact shelving would work?

TBL provides good patron service; the staff is excellent in meeting patron needs; staff and volunteers work well together toward common goals. The database is good. Transferring to the KLAS automation system has improved service at a minimal cost and the staff has adapted well. Overall staff in the building has good relationships. The recording program is good, produces excellent quality materials.

We haven't been as successful in getting the word out in the state; there are lots of people who could use the services. The staff work environment isn't as good as we'd like; we asked legislature for one additional full time employee. (Have the equivalent of 6 full time equivalent volunteers.) Beyond that it takes a while to fill vacancies, so it's frustrating.

In terms of progress on goals, it would be a "B-" on safety. There's lots of non-TBL traffic walking through our area. A "B+" on comfortable: we've made a big effort on ergonomic changes, but the building itself seems to have heating/cooling/air quality problems.

A "B" on efficient: we could do better if we had the resources for cubicles or offices. It would be better if the staff had more privacy. The volunteers are efficient. We do a darn good job for what we have. A "B+" on service. The service is excellent! Digitization and newer services are coming. A "C+" on sufficient funding and staff: This is the only department within the library that has a trust fund, but we have no Friends organization. The Trust Fund was last used in '98 for automation. We need a full time outreach person.

We need a work plan for digitization. People doing the recordings here want to go digital, but we're taking a conservative approach, waiting to see what NLS does.

We have tried to increase the numbers of users, but haven't had any firm objectives. We could expand descriptive videos, but at this point we're serving just the NLS-eligible and descriptive videos would draw users from beyond the NLS-eligible.

We're running out of space. We're doing our last major weeding project and then we'll need to delete some of the older items. But, people want westerns, romances, etc., the older things that NLS isn't re-recording.

The next plan needs to be more progressive, inclusive than our old one.